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OO RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHJM
DE RUEHML #1839/01 1550657
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 040657Z JUN 07
FM AMEMBASSY MANILA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6799
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS IMMEDIATE
RUEHAB/AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN IMMEDIATE 4545
RUEHC/DEPT OF LABOR WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEAWJB/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEAHLC/DEPT OF HOMELAND SECURITY WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHMCSSU/FBI WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 001839

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MTS, EAP/RSP, G/TIP, INL/AAE, DRL
LABOR FOR ILAB
PASS TO USAID/AAE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: KCRM KWMN ELAB PHUM RP

SUBJECT: FIGHTING TRAFFICKING FROM MANILA TO ABIDJAN AND
BACK -- A SUCCESS STORY

REF: MANILA 788

¶11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The collaborative efforts of international organizations, the Philippine NGO Visayan Forum Foundation (VFF), and the USG led to the rescue of four Filipino trafficking victims in Abidjan and their return to Manila earlier this year. This successful operation demonstrates the abilities and readiness in particular of Philippine NGOs to coordinate with governments and international organizations to provide immediate assistance to trafficked Filipino victims. VFF and its partner NGOs have also coordinated with Philippine law enforcement agencies to file charges against the alleged recruiters and traffickers in this case. End Summary.

THE LONG TENTACLES OF TRAFFICKING

¶12. (SBU) The majority of Filipino trafficking victims go to Malaysia, South Korea, Japan, and other destinations within Asia. However, there is increasing evidence that trafficking to the Middle East and even parts of Africa is becoming more prevalent. In a recent case, a female recruiter in Cavite (south of Metro Manila) approached several women about employment opportunities as waitresses in France. The recruiter promised a monthly salary of 17,000 Philippine pesos (approximately USD 350) and assured them they would not "work outside" (a euphemism for prostitution). Lured by these false promises, the four women acquired passports and the recruiter obtained their visas -- which turned out to be not for France but for Cote d'Ivoire.

¶13. (SBU) The women, including one 17-year old, departed Manila in two groups, escorted by a Filipino male who handled their check-in procedures at the airport, as well as all other travel details. Some of the victims later told poloff that they did not realize that Abidjan, the city listed on their plane tickets, was not in France. Upon arrival in Abidjan, a Filipina and her Taiwanese partner met them and escorted them to a bar/club that the couple owned in the Abidjan neighborhood of Treichville. The Filipina "mama-san" (the bar owner), whom the victims later described as herself a former trafficked victim, then informed them that they would not receive the promised salaries until after they had paid off the large debts owed for their travel and escort fees (which amounted to more than USD \$2500). The bar owners even refused to provide food because of the so-called

"debts." The victims reluctantly began their work as prostitutes in the Treichville bar, earning only tips to support themselves.

¶4. (SBU) In January, a regular customer (a French national) of one of the women agreed to help her to return to the Philippines. He anonymously contacted Anti-Slavery International (ASI) in London, which coordinated the women's rescue with Interpol and the Philippine-based Visayan Forum Foundation (VFF). (Note: ASI had in 2005 awarded VFF Executive Director Cecilia Flores-Oebanda with its Anti-Slavery Award for her advocacy on behalf of trafficking victims. End note.) ASI also contacted the State Department's Trafficking in Persons Office (G/TIP).

¶5. (SBU) Interpol led the rescue operation on February 22, and then sheltered the women in a facility in Abidjan until their March 9 return to Manila, where they received assistance and counseling services at one of VFF's USG-supported facilities. The victims said that they believed Ivorian authorities had arrested the bar owners.

PURSUING JUSTICE IN MANILA, TOO

¶6. (SBU) The victims remain at the VFF safehouse. Attorneys from the NGOs International Justice Mission (also a USG grantee) and the Child Justice League, in coordination with VFF, are providing legal guidance to the victims and will likely represent the victims during future judicial proceedings in Manila against the recruiters and possibly even against the Abidjan-based Philippine citizen. These

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NGOs have also coordinated the case with the Philippine Department of Justice's Task Force Against Trafficking in Persons. However, the victims have expressed concern that the traffickers' accomplices in the Philippines are harassing and threatening their families, in an attempt to convince the victims to withdraw their complaints.

COMMENT

¶7. (SBU) Despite the proactive efforts of Philippine NGOs and the Philippine government against TIP, traffickers are still able to recruit and exploit victims in the Philippines as part of a worldwide web of injustice. This successful rescue operation demonstrates the abilities and readiness in particular of Philippine NGOs to coordinate with governments and international organizations to provide immediate assistance to trafficked Filipino victims. Despite the usually slow Philippine justice system, Philippine NGO caseworkers are optimistic about eventually successful prosecutions under the 2003 Anti-TIP Law, although there are still some unresolved legal issues about prosecution in the Philippines of cases dealing with exploitation in another country.

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<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eap/manila/index.cfm>

You can also access this site through the State Department's Classified SIPRNET website:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/>

KENNEY